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Statement submitted by Campaign Life Coalition, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council*

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* The present statement is issued without formal editing.

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Statement

Campaign Life Coalition is a national, non-profit organization involved in political action and advocacy for legal and cultural change in Canada with respect to protecting human life and the natural family. It works in identifying and assisting pro-life and pro-family candidates to run for public office at all levels of government, promotes civic engagement at the grassroots level, and encourages voting based on principles, not party. Campaign Life Coalition is an accredited non-governmental organization in Special Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council.

We call upon Member States at the 63rd session of the Commission on the Status of Women to prioritize the human rights of women and girls through the development of more comprehensive social protection systems in the pursuit of authentic gender equality and the universal empowerment of women. Among the women of the world, pregnant women, especially those in crisis pregnancies, and the next generation of preborn girl children are increasingly accounted among the most vulnerable. As a result, they require special attention to ensure not only the protection of their most fundamental human rights but the realization of their fullest potential.

Section 5.2 of Sustainable Development Goal 5 calls for the elimination of all forms of violence against all women and girls in order to achieve authentic gender equality and the universal empowerment of women and girls. Abortion, as the intentional destruction of a child in the womb, which is disproportionately the girl child, at the expense of the mother's physical, emotional and psychological well-being, is in direct violation of any efforts to secure such things. In addition, it further undermines efforts to eliminate maternal mortality, foster sustainable population development and increase social prosperity. In the same breadth, its rampant popularity perpetuates cultural devaluation of motherhood as well as the unique contributions that women make to society.

Contrary to the popular belief that women freely choose abortion, a recent study, published in the Journal of American Physicians and Surgeons, has found that almost three quarters (73.8 per cent) of women with a history of abortion that were surveyed admitted to having experienced at least subtle forms of pressure to abort their child. Of the 987 women that were surveyed, more than half (58.3 per cent) decided to abort their child in order to make others happy and nearly 30 per cent said that they were afraid that they would lose their partner if they did not choose to terminate their child. These are not the actions or motivations of empowered women living in the freedom of true gender equality. These are the actions of women who, finding themselves in the crux of a difficult situation, have felt that they had only one choice, which is, of course, no choice at all.

In another study, Theresa Burke and David Reardon, authors of Forbidden Grief: The Unspoken Pain of Abortion, state that as many as 60 per cent to 83 per cent of women undergoing abortion would have preferred to give birth, if their circumstances had been better. In other words, most women 'choose' to abort their children not in a spirit of freedom and liberty, but rather out of a sense of desolation, which is largely the result of a lack of social support networks and a lack of adequate attention to maternal health needs. It is, therefore, in the best interest of women, as well as their pursuit of empowerment and authentic freedom, that the Member States invest in social protection systems that guarantee the best outcome for both mother and child.

The difficulty of some pregnancies is dramatically increased by a person's circumstance. The vulnerability of a mother and child is affected by a variety of factors including poverty, state in life, social status, social security, cultural norms, conflict, availability of basic public services, access to adequate nutrition and maternal healthcare, as well as education. However, the solution to a difficult

pregnancy is not to eliminate the child, but rather to eliminate the factors that make it so difficult. Broad access to public services and sustainable infrastructure is integral to the empowerment of women across the globe as well as the assurance of security and wellbeing for both mothers and their children. To ensure the implementation of effective, responsive programs, we highlight the importance of South to South cooperation, especially as a means of ensuring culturally appropriate programming that respects the sovereignty of each and every nation.

Finally, the lack of availability of social protection systems and public services for expectant mothers, especially those in a crisis situation, betrays a cultural devaluation of motherhood. As a natural process that is intimately tied to the identity and personage of women around the world, motherhood maintains a special place of significance in the world and for the world. As a result of its inseparability from the woman's identity, as well as its natural importance, motherhood should be supported by society in a way that empowers women to both thrive as mothers as well as provide for those under their care. The mother should, by virtue of her innate value as an equal member of the human family, be entitled to the type of support that enables her to move forward with confidence while also circumventing any recourse to a means of provision that would prove damaging to either herself, her pre-born child or her family.

Calls to Action

We call upon Member States to enact effective, comprehensive social protection programs that suit maternal needs, without eliminating maternity. These programs should be responsible for creating social environments in which women are protected, empowered, informed and free from any forms of economic, social or cultural pressure that would obstruct their access to the kind of adequate public services that make it possible for both mother and child to live healthy, fulfilled lives.

We call upon Member States to create and support effective, comprehensive social protection systems that foster a culture of respect for mothers, regardless of their circumstances, social status, race or age. These systems should not only be attentive to the physical needs of the mother and her family, but should also consider their unique emotional, intellectual, spiritual and social needs. To this end, we highlight the importance of maternal education, public support for new and existing social support networks and women's aid groups, greater maternal support for women in the workplace and special social protection systems for single mothers.

We call upon Member States to encourage South to South Cooperation so as to increase the preservation and sharing of best practices in maternal education, support and accompaniment without the interference of ideologically driven investment or aid, which lends itself to the institutionalization of dependency, poverty and violence.